

We have very tight time constraints this morning, so I will just make a few brief opening comments. I want to begin by thanking Secretary Rice for adjusting her schedule to be here.

The Iraq War is our nation's top foreign policy priority. It has also meant extraordinary sacrifice for our troops and their families. Over 3,800 of our soldiers have been killed and another 28,000 have been wounded. And we have already spent over \$450 billion on the war.

For most of this year Congress has focused its attention on assessing the military surge. Much less attention has been devoted to evaluating political progress in Iraq.

But almost every expert agrees that political reconciliation is the key to achieving lasting peace in Iraq. As General Petraeus has observed: "There is no military solution to a problem like that in Iraq."

I think that's exactly right. And that's why it's so important to assess what the State Department is doing in Iraq and to understand the impacts that corruption, mismanagement, and lax oversight are having on our mission.

Beginning in July, our Committee has held a series of hearings to examine these issues. We have held hearings on the Iraq Embassy, Blackwater, and corruption in the Iraqi ministries.

These hearings and our investigation have raised important questions: Is the Maliki government too corrupt to succeed? Have the reckless actions of private contractors like Blackwater turned Iraqis against us? Why did the State Department select a Kuwaiti company under investigation for kickbacks and bribery to build the largest embassy in the world? Can the State Department account for over a billion dollars spent on a contract to train the Iraqi police?

The executive office with direct responsibility over these issues is the State Department and the official most responsible for them is Secretary Rice. The quality and effectiveness of her actions in Iraq and the State Department's management are a matter of urgent national

concern.

And that is the focus of today's hearing.

This week President Bush asked the American people to spend another \$46 billion in Iraq. The President also is continuing to ask our bravest Americans to risk their lives there.

As Congress evaluates these requests, we need to know what the State Department is doing to combat corruption in Iraq. We need to know whether the Department is capable of real oversight over Blackwater and other government contractors. And, most of all, we need to know whether the mistakes of the State Department have jeopardized any chance for political success in Iraq.